

Docket No. F-7219

Ser. No. 10/007,732

REMARKS

Claims 1, 3-9, 11-13, 15, 16 and new claims 17-23 are now in this application. Claims 1-16 are rejected. Claims 2, 10 and 14 are cancelled herein. Claims 1, 3-9, 11-13, 15 and 16 are amended herein to clarify the invention, to broaden language as deemed appropriate and to address matters of form unrelated to substantive patentability issues.

For the convenience of the Examiner, APPENDIX I is provided herewith having a complete set of pending claims with all amendments effected therein.

Drawings

To overcome the objection to the drawings, the specification is amended to conform to the use of reference numeral 2 to designate a network as in Fig. 1.

Claim Rejections-35 U.S.C. §112

Claims 1, 3-9, 11-13, 15 and 16 are amended to change the word "net" to "network". It is pointed out that the Internet is one form of a network with which the invention may be used.

Claims 4, 12 and 16 are amended to clarify that a predetermined number of points are added to the referring member player's score. Claims 5 and 6 are also amended to remove the informalities noted by the Examiner.

Claims 2, 10 and 14 are cancelled.

In view of the changes to the claims, it is respectfully submitted that the Examiner's rejection of claims 1-16 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, has been overcome and should be removed.

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Claim Rejections-35 U.S.C. §103

Claims 1-5 and 9-16 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over the "Network News" reference in view of the "Contents of the New Products for Cell Phone" reference (the Contents reference).

The Examiner's rejection is respectfully traversed in view of amended claims 1, 9 and 13. Claims 1, 9 and 13 are amended to clarify the manner in which a non-member player is enrolled in the virtual company.

Enrollment is based on whether the non-member player is responding to recruiting information generated in response to a referral by a member player. If the non-member player responds to the recruiting information, he or she does not have to undergo an employment test, i.e. a series of questions relating to the possibility of employment with the virtual company. However, if the non-member player is seeking employment without having been sent recruiting information, he or she must take the employment test. This feature is described in the specification, e.g., in the paragraph bridging pages 11 and 12 wherein the enrollment processing portion 107 is designed to "jump" to the introductory screen when a non-member player accepts the solicitation to join the virtual company i.e., responds to the recruiting information. The employment test is thereby avoided.

Thus, claim 1 now specifies that the enrollment processing means perform different enrollment processing upon receiving application information from the non-member player depending on whether the application information is received from the non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member player. Specifically, the enrollment processing means perform enrollment processing without the employment test "only upon receipt of application information from a non-member player in response to the recruiting information" and, when the non-member player provides application information not in response to recruiting information, the enrollment processing means performs enrollment processing with the employment test. Claims 9 and 13 are amended to include similar features.

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The prior art cited by the Examiner does not disclose varying the enrollment of a non-member player depending on whether this non-member player responds to recruiting information sent by a member player.

The Network News reference includes a section called "Friend Introduction Area" which describes a system for inviting a new member. When an existing member successfully refers a new member, a reward such as "free access" is given to the newly joined member and the free access is also given to the existing, referring member when the newly joined member hold its membership for a certain time duration. The existing member is thus provided with an incentive to invite a new member to join and at the same time, an incentive is provided for the non-member to join.

There is no description of any game involving a simulated virtual company in this reference and thus the reference cannot teach or suggest varying enrollment based on a response to recruiting information.

The Contents reference describes a competition game played with a cell-phone in which a user (cell phone user) is competing with other users to arrive at a president's position. The game is transmitted to the cell phone. An employment test is given and passage of the test allows a user to join a virtual cell phone company to become an employee thereof, the employees will be given chances to be promoted and/or to negotiate a salary and if successful, the winning employee can become a president of the virtual cell phone company so that he/she can promote and demote the other employees of the virtual company. After becoming a president, the user must successfully manage the company because there is a chance that the virtual company goes bankrupt.

The Contents reference does not disclose varying enrollment in the game based on a response to recruiting information. There are no conditions which enable a non-member to avoid the employment test.

Since the Network News and Contents reference do not disclose all of the features of claims 1, 9 and 13, one skilled in the art could not combine the

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purported teachings of these reference and arrive at the embodiments of the invention set forth in these claims or in claims 3-5, 11, 12, 15 and 16 which depend therefrom.

Claims 6-8 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over the "Network News" reference in view of the Contents reference and further in view of Jikkyo Powerful Pro Baseball 2000 (the Jikkyo reference).

The Jikkyo reference does not disclose varying the enrollment of a non-member player in a game depending on whether this non-member player responds to recruiting information sent by a member player (as set forth in claim 1 upon which claims 6-8 depend). Therefore, the Jikkyo reference does not overcome the deficiencies of the combination of the Network News and Contents references and one skilled in the art could not combine the purported teachings of these three reference and arrive at the embodiments of the invention set forth in claims 6-8.

In view of the changes to the claims and the arguments presented above, it is respectfully submitted that the Examiner's rejections of the claims under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) have been overcome and should be removed.

New claims

Claims 17-23 are added.

Claim 17 recites that the referral information entered by the member player includes a message from the member-player to the non-member player which is included in the recruiting information. This feature is not disclosed in the cited prior art. Specifically, the Network News reference includes only the non-member's name and address.

Claim 18 recites that the recruiting information generating means generate recruiting information including the member player's virtual company and position. Claim 19 recites that the recruiting information generating means generate recruiting information including a URL address for jumping to the network game system. These features are not disclosed in the cited prior art.

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Claim 20 is a new independent claim directed to a network game system which includes a plurality of virtual companies whereby a non-member player can search these companies to select one to join. This feature is not disclosed in the cited prior art.

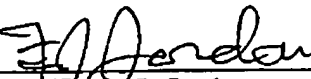
Claims 21-23 depend on claim 20 and set forth additional features of the network game system of claim 20.

One further independent claim in excess of three is added. Accordingly, please charge the fee of \$86 to Deposit Account No. 10-1250.

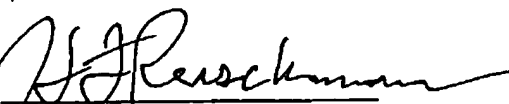
Applicant respectfully requests a one month extension of time for responding to the Office Action. Please charge the fee of \$110 for the extension of time to Deposit Account No. 10-1250.

In light of the foregoing, the application is now believed to be in proper form for allowance of all claims and notice to that effect is earnestly solicited. Please charge any deficiency or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 10-1250.

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APPENDIX I**ALL PENDING CLAIMS WITH AMENDMENTS EFFECTED THEREIN**

1. (Currently Amended) A network game system for playing a game with the aim of achieving a predetermined goal of the game, said game being played, via monitor-equipped data terminals operated by member players, in a game space simulating a virtual company provided on a game server, while in communication with the game server on a network, said system comprising:

question generating means for generating questions as an employment test in response to access from the monitor-equipped data terminal of a non-member player;

transmitting/receiving means for transmitting and receiving data to and from the monitor-equipped data terminals including transmitting the questions generating by the question generating means to the monitor-equipped data terminal of the non-member player via the network and receiving information from the non-member player in response to the questions via the network;

character-training process means for evaluating if the non-member player is qualified as an employee of the virtual company based on the information sent back by the non-member player via the network;

recruiting information generating means for generating, upon receipt from a member player of referral information specifying a mail address of a data terminal of a non-member player, recruiting information including information specifying the member player, the recruiting information being sent to the non-member player via the transmitting/receiving means;

enrollment processing means for performing different enrollment processing upon receiving application information from the non-member player depending on whether the application information is received from the non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of said non-member player, the enrollment processing means performing enrollment processing without the employment test only upon receipt of application information from a non-

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member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member and, when the non-member player provides application information not in response to recruiting information, the enrollment processing means performing enrollment processing with the employment test; and

advantage conferring means for conferring to the referring member player advantages useful in achieving the goal in the game.

3. (Currently Amended) The network game system according to claim 1, further comprising report generating means for generating a report informing the referring member player that the non-member referred by him or her has enrolled.

4. (Currently Amended) The network game system according to claim 1, wherein the goal of said game is for a score representing a number of points accumulated in the course of game play to reach a predetermined value, and said advantage conferring means adds a predetermined number of points to the member player's score.

5. (Currently Amended) The network game system according to claim 1, wherein said game is a character-training game in which virtual employees associated with data terminals are trained, aiming at becoming president of said virtual company.

6. (Currently Amended) The network game system according to claim 5, wherein said game server comprises:

question generating means for generating a predetermined number of question sessions, said sessions being shown at predetermined intervals on data terminal monitors;

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transmitting/receiving means for transmitting a generated question to a data terminal and for receiving from a data terminal response data in response to the question shown on the data terminal monitor;

a parameter storage portion for storing said response data in association with an increment/decrement parameter value required for character-training;

a personal data storage portion for storing at least a parameter value updatable with reference to information that identifies an employee; and

character-training processing means for adding to a current parameter value said increment/decrement parameter value determined from the content of response data to a question, storing the result in said personal data storage portion for each virtual employee, and on the basis of this parameter value, performing a process to promote or demote within the virtual company the virtual employee associated with said data terminal.

7. (Currently Amended) The network game system according to claim 6, further comprising game play processing means allowing a player to select any of a plurality of game modes, wherein said parameter storage portion has increment/decrement parameter values set for the respective different game modes.

8. (Currently Amended) The network game system according to claim 5, wherein said question generating means poses a predetermined question when accessed from a data terminal.

9. (Currently Amended) A network game play processing method for proceeding a game with the aim of achieving a predetermined goal of the game, said game being played, via monitor-equipped data terminals operated by member players, in a game space simulating a virtual company provided on a game server, while in communication with said game server on a network, said method comprising the steps of:

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generating questions as an employment test in response to access from the monitor-equipped data terminal of a non-member player;

transmitting the generated questions to the monitor-equipped data terminal of the non-member player via the network;

receiving information from the non-member player in response to the questions via the network;

evaluating if the non-member player is qualified as an employee of the virtual company based on the information sent back by the non-member player via the network;

generating recruiting information including information specifying a member player, in the event that said game server receives from said member player referral information specifying a mail address of a data terminal of a non-member player;

transmitting the recruiting information to the non-member player;

performing different enrollment processing upon receiving application information from the non-member player depending on whether the application information is received from the non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member player, said enrollment processing step comprising the steps of performing enrollment processing without the employment test only upon receipt of application information from a non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member and performing enrollment processing with the employment test when the non-member player provides application information not in response to recruiting information; and

conferring to the referring member player advantages useful in achieving the goal in the game.

11. (Currently Amended) The network game play processing method according to claim 9, wherein a report informing the referring member player that

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a non-member referred by him or her has enrolled is generated and sent to the referring member player.

12. (Currently Amended) The network game play processing method according to claim 9, wherein the goal of said game is for a score presenting a number of points accumulated in the course of game play to reach a predetermined value, and said useful advantage is the addition of a predetermined number of points to the member player's score.

13. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable storage medium for storing a network game play processing program for playing a game with the aim of achieving a predetermined goal of the game, said game being played, via monitor-equipped data terminals operated by member players, in a game space simulating a virtual company provided on a game server, while in communication with said game server on a network, said network game play processing program comprising the steps of:

generating questions as an employment test in response to access from the monitor-equipped data terminal of a non-member player;

transmitting the generated questions to the monitor-equipped data terminal of the non-member player via the network;

receiving information from the non-member player in response to the questions via the network;

evaluating if the non-member player is qualified as an employee of the virtual company based on the information sent back by the non-member player via the network;

generating recruiting information including information specifying a member player, in the event that said game server receives from said member player referral information specifying the mail address of the data terminal of a non-member player;

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transmitting the recruiting information to the non-member player;

performing different enrollment processing upon receiving application information from the non-member player depending on whether the application information is received from the non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member player, said enrollment processing step comprising the steps of performing enrollment processing without the employment test only upon receipt of application information from a non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member and performing enrollment processing with the employment test when the non-member player provides application information not in response to recruiting information; and

conferring to the referring member player advantages useful in achieving the goal in the game.

15. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium for storing a network game play program according to claim 13, wherein a report informing the referring member player that a non-member referred by him or her has enrolled is generated and sent to the referring member player.

16. (Currently Amended) The computer-readable storage medium for storing a network game play program according to claim 13, wherein the goal of said game is for a score representing a number of points accumulated in the course of game play to reach a predetermined value, and said useful advantage is the addition of a predetermined number of points to the member player's score.

17. (New) The network game system according to claim 1, wherein the referral information includes a message from the member-player to the non-member player and the recruiting information includes the message.

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18. (New) The network game system according to claim 1, wherein the recruiting information generating means are arranged to generate recruiting information including the member player's virtual company and position.

19. (New) The network game system according to claim 1, wherein the recruiting information generating means are arranged to generate recruiting information including a URL address for jumping to the network game system.

20. (New) A network game system for playing a game with the aim of achieving a predetermined goal of the game, said game being played, via monitor-equipped data terminals operated by member players, in a game space simulating a virtual company provided on a game server, while in communication with the game server on a network, said system comprising:

a company data storage portion for storing data relating to a plurality of virtual companies;

transmitting/receiving means for transmitting data from the game server to the monitor-equipped data terminal of a non-member player via the network;

a game play processing portion for reading the company data from the company data storage portion and transmitting the data to the monitor-equipped data terminal of the non-member player and allowing a selection of one of the companies by the non-member player;

recruiting information generating means for generating, upon receipt from a member player of referral information specifying a mail address of a data terminal of a non-member player, recruiting information including information specifying the member player, the recruiting information being sent to the non-member player via the transmitting/receiving means;

enrollment processing means for performing enrollment processing upon receiving application information from the non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member player; and

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advantage conferring means for conferring to the referring member player advantages useful in achieving the goal in the game.

21. (New) The game system according to claim 20, wherein the company data storage portion stores a plurality of virtual company data comprising various categories of businesses and includes as virtual company data, the name of the president, total assets, number of employees and ratings indicating a popularity index and trust.

22. (New) The game system according to claim 20, further comprising question generating means for generating questions as an employment test in response to access from the monitor-equipped data terminal of a non-member player, the enrollment processing means being arranged to perform different enrollment processing upon receiving application information from the non-member player depending on whether the application information is received from the non-member player in response to the recruiting information sent to the mail address of said non-member player.

23. (New) The game system according to claim 20, further comprising question generating means for generating questions as an employment test in response to access from the monitor-equipped data terminal of a non-member player, the enrollment processing means being arranged to perform enrollment processing without the employment test only upon receipt of application information from a non-member player in response to recruiting information sent to the mail address of the non-member and, when the non-member player provides application information not in response to recruiting information, the enrollment processing means being arranged to perform enrollment processing with the employment test.